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ABSTRACT

Since some critics have proposed that correlations between crosscultural comparisons of high prestige occupations and standard occupational indexes might prove lower if larger numbers of occupation titles were compared and if nonurban populations were studied, the occupational prestige evaluations of a rurally isolated group of American Indians were studied. A panel of seven judges, all of whom were Mississippi Choctaw Indians and Bureau of Indian Affairs or Tribal administrators, were asked to rank 94 occupation titles (derived from a sample of Choctaw high school students who had previously indicated that these titles reflected their: occupational aspirations or expectations, parent's aspirations for them, and role model's or family breadwinner's occupations). Working independently, each panel member ranked the positions from low to high using the criteria of education, responsibility, attractiveness, reward, security, and general prestige. When compared via an analysis variance test with the prestige scores of matching occupation titles in the Duncan Socioeconomic Index, the index revealed significant differences. The product moment correlation (.78) was lower than would be expected between a subsociety and its dominant society. Considerations of occupation relevance and accessibility and the Choctaw cultural isolation seem to have influenced the variations found. (JC)

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OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE AMONG THE CHOCTAW INDIANS[1]

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ABSTRACT

Most crosscultural comparisons of the prestige assigned to occupations have yielded impressively high correlations with the NORC scores, regardless of the degree of development of the countries involved. Some critics have proposed that correlations might be lower (1) if larger numbers of occupational titles were compared and (2) if non-urban populations were studied. The present study compared the occupational prestige evaluations of Choctaw Indians (located on a rurally isolated reservation in east central Mississippi) for 94 occupations with the prestige scores of matching titles in the Duncan Socioeconomic Index. An analysis of variance test demonstrated that significant differences existed between the two indices. The product-moment correlation of .78 is lower than would be expected between a subsociety and the dominant society of a highly industrialized nation. Considerations of relevance and accessibility of the occupations to the Choctaw society, as well as unique cultural and situational factors, appear to have influenced the variations found.

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[1]This paper is drawn from a larger study of the occupational orientations of Choctaw high school students (Spencer, 1973), supported by the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station and the S-81 Southern Regional Youth Study.

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OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE AMONG THE CHOCTAW INDIANS

Sociologists have compiled a great deal of evidence demonstrating the stability of the prestige that has accompanied occupations across time and space. The most dramatic evidence to date is the product-moment correlation of .99 between the well-known and widely-used National Opinion Research Center (NORC) scores of 1947 and the scores obtained in the 1963 replicating study (Hodge, et al., 1966b:326). High correlations between the 1963 scores and a series of study scores dating back to 1925 led Hodge, et al. (1966b:329) to conclude that "there have been no substantial changes in occupational prestige in the United States since 1925."

Spatial stability has been asserted on the basis of high correlations obtained from many cross-national comparisons of comparable occupational titles (Hodge, et al., 1966a; Inkeles and Rossi, 1955; Tirakian, 1958; Thomas, 1962; Armer, 1968). Inkeles and Rossi (1955:329-39) reported high correlations between the occupational prestige ratings of six highly industrialized countries (i.e., the United States, Great Britain, New Zealand, Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union). On the basis of their findings, they proposed that structural similarities between the countries, particularly industrialization and nationalization, were responsible for the common status hierarchy.

Discoveries by Tiryakian (1958), Thomas (1962), and Armer (1968) that less developed societies (i.e., in the Phillippines, Indonesia,

and Nigeria, respectively) held prestige rankings for occupations similar to those of the United States served to raise serious questions regarding the industrialization hypothesis. Hodge, et al. (1966a) made a secondary analysis of a number of studies involving a total of 24 countries, some of which varied widely in terms of industrial development. Although greater variations emerged among the 24 nations that were found by Inkeles and Rossi (1955), the average correlation coefficient of .91 was only slightly lower than the average of the Inkeles-Rossi comparisons (i.e., 94). Hodge, et al. (1966a:310) concluded that structural similarities other than industrial development must be operating to produce the congruency of occupational evaluations. They noted that common to all societies of any complexity are the specialized institutions which

> . . . carry out political, religious and economic functions, and . . . provide for the health, education, and welfare of the population,. . . Considering the importance of these functions to the maintenance of complex social systems, it is not surprising that occupations at the top of these institutional structures should be highly regarded. Moreover, these are the very occupations which require the greatest training and skill to which the greatest material rewards accrue.

Marsh (1971:221-22) concurred with this view and stressed the point that selected role characteristics (i.e., education required, authority inherent in, and rewards that accrue from a given occupation), cross societal boundaries and serve as universal prestige indicators.

Taylor (1968:166-69) analyzed theory and data in the area and concluded that "the weight of evidence . . . lies in the direction of a functional distribution of occupations in an hierarchy."

Some researchers in recent years have raised provoking questions regarding the research methodology used in the occupational prestige studies. Haller and Lewis (1966:211) noted that researchers in the area have tended to select for comparative purposes a small number of occupations which are common to, and thus most easily translatable between, societies. They suggested that had larger numbers of occupational titles been compared, correlations obtained might have been lower. There is some evidence which suggests that occupations which vary somewhat across societal boundaries show smaller correlations (e.g., blue collar occupations, service occupations, etc.) (Hodge, et al., 1966a:318-19).

Another possibility, pointed out by Haller, et al. (1972:941-42) is that the high correlations found "may be due largely to . . . overgeneralization of research done in urban areas" (underscoring added). Haller, et al. (1972), in a study of three Brazilian communities which varied in degree of isolation from urban areas, found evidence to support their hypothesis that correlations with the NORC scale would diminish as isolation of the population samples increased. The lowest correlations were between the most isolated community studied, Acucena, and the NORC scores (.67) and between Acucena and the urban center of Sao Paulo (.69). Generalizing from their findings, they posited that "isolated sectors of many contemporary societies may have occupational

prestige hierarchies . . . which differ from the well-known Euro-American form" (p. 941). Haller and Lewis (1966:211-12) proposed that the factor involved in the intersocietal similarities of occupational evaluations may be "urbanization in general rather than industrialization in particular."

Armer (1968:35) analyzed the occupational status evaluations of self-identified "modern" and "traditional" subsamples in Hausaland, a non-industrial subsociety in Nigeria. Correlations with NORC scores were .80 for the traditional group and .90 for the better-educated "modern" group. Armer concluded that the variations were less than significant, but suggested that further research is needed in less complex and more isolated societies before final conclusions are reached. In addition, he pointed out the need for a more adequate theoretical explanation for the "discrepancies in occupational prestige evaluation which appear but tend to have little effect on overall similarities between prestige structures" (p. 36).

Study Population

American Indians living on reservations are, in many ways, unique subsocieties within the United States. One of the most salient characteristics of reservation populations is their isolation--physical, structural, and cultural--from the larger society. Most reservations are physically isolated in rural, economically depressed areas. The unique relationship of Indians to the federal government has resulted in their structural isolation. The combination of physical and structural isolation has contributed toward prolonged cultural isolation.

The Mississippi Choctaws, descendants of those Choctaws who refused to migrate to Oklahoma under an 1830 treaty, are no exception to the above generalizations. Peterson (1970a, 1970b) has documented their struggles to survive both physically and culturally. Labeled as nonwhite by the white population in the region, they declined any employment which would identify them with blacks and, thus, were excluded from participation in the economic structure of the region until the rise of the sharecropper system following the Civil War. Thereafter, most Choctaws subsisted as sharecroppers, small farmers, or agricultural day laborers. This low-level participation in the local economic structure enabled them to resist continuing removal efforts on the part of the federal government and made possible the development of seven Choctaw communities in the rural areas of their ancestral homeland which were later designated as a reservation area (De Rosier, 1970:174-84; Peterson, 1972:1286-87; and Bounds, 1964:47-55).

The decline of farming and the rise of farm-related and other industry in the economy of the region in the 1950's resulted in the loss of agricultural jobs for many Choctaw families. Unemployment rates rose as lack of vocational and English skills as well as discrimination against the hiring of Indians in the local industries prevented Choctaws from finding local employment. Two major changes in 1964 made prospects somewhat brighter for Choctaws who wished to remain in the reservation communities. For the first time, high school facilities were made available on the reservation; and, secondly, the Civil Rights Act opened up employment in local industry. Other more

recent changes in the political and economic structure of the Choctaw tribal government have resulted in increased employment alternatives. In spite of these changes, however, the median level of formal education of the reservation population in 1970 was only eight years and the median family income was only slightly above $3,000 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1970).

Given the physical, structural, and cultural isolation of the Mississippi Choctaws and their history of restricted access to education and occupations, it seemed likely that occupations might be defined variantly by individuals of that subsociety than they are by the larger society.

Methodology

A panel of seven judges, all of whom were Choctaw Indians and BIA or Tribal administrators, was asked to rank 94 occupations on the basis of their prestige among Choctaws. According to Goode and Hatt (1952:256-57), a small panel of experts is an acceptable and sometimes preferable method of eliciting group opinion, particularly when the problem of lack of knowledge may arise with the use of a representative sample. The rural and cultural isolation and low levels of education of the majority of the Choctaws, particularly older Choctaws, preclude, for the average Choctaw, an extensive knowledge of occupations. In addition, a language barrier exists for many older Choctaws. The panel of officials was believed to be a uniquely qualified group to serve as judges of the prestige of occupations among Choctaws in that they alone possessed an awareness of the prestige of occupations among both lower class and middle class Choctaws.

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Each judge was individually presented with a deck of cards on which were printed the titles of the 94 occupations. The 94 occupations included were occupations which a sample of Choctaw high school students had previously indicated as their (1) occupational aspirations, (2) occupational expectations, (3) parent's aspirations for them, (4) role models' occupations, or (5) family breadwinners' occupations.[2] Each worked independently and was instructed to use the following criteria in ranking the positions from low to high: (1) the education, skill, training, or experience required for the job; (2) the responsibility involved in the job; (3) the attractiveness of the work; (4) the rewards that accrue to the position; (5) the security or lack of it inherent in the job; and (6) the general prestige of the job among Choctaws.

Analysis of variance tests verified the absence of significant differences between the evaluations of the seven judges and the lack of a significant difference between the mean and median ranks of the occupations. The mean rankings were, therefore, used to order the occupations into the Choctaw Occupational Prestige Index. [Table 1 about here.]

Because of the limited number of comparable occupational titles included in the NORC scale, the Duncan Socioeconomic Status Index was used to represent the prestige of occupations for the larger American society. (See Table 1.) The Duncan Index is an expansion of the NORC scale and includes all occupations listed in the detailed classification of the 1950 Census (Duncan, 1961:109-38; Reiss, 1961:263-75).

Lasswell (1965:439) evaluated it as "the most analytically powerful occupation scale now in existence." This use of this comprehensive index of occupations to obtain matching titles serves to eliminate one of the major criticisms of other studies (i.e., the restricted number of occupational titles sampled) (Haller, et al., 1966:211).

Analysis of variance and a product-moment correlation coefficient (r) were computed using the mean ranks of the 94 occupations in the Choctaw Index and the mean scores of their counterparts in the Duncan Index.[3] A review of the literature in the area reveals that a wide variety of techniques and procedures have been used in previous occupational prestige comparisons. Correlations of scores and rankings obtained have yielded high correlations despite the variety of methodological and statistical techniques used, leading Hodge, et al. (1966a:329) to conclude that "the overall structure of prestige is invariant under quite drastic changes in technique." Bohrnstedt and Carter (1971:131-32) have contended that

> . . . even though some errors in inference may occasionally be made by using ordinal data with parametric techniques, the increase in power makes the risk seem small . . . Therefore, we conclude that, when one has a variable which is measured at least by the ordinal level, parametric statistics not only can be, but should be, applied.

Results and Discussion

The application of the analysis of variance test between the Choctaw Index and the Duncan Index yielded an F ratio of 6.024 which,

with one and 186 degrees of freedom, was significant at the .01 level. This finding indicates that significant differences exist between the two indices.

Computation of the product-moment coefficient of correlation demonstrated a correlation of .78. Application of a test of significance indicated that the coefficient is significant beyond the .001 level. This coefficient is among the lowest found by any previous crosscultural studies of occupational prestige.

When the correlation coefficient is converted to a coefficient of determination (r^2), it can be demonstrated that the relationship between the two indices accounts for only 61 percent of the variation involved in predicting the prestige of occupations of the Choctaw Index from the Duncan Index. Thus, 39 percent of the variation is unexplained by the relationship between the two hierarchies. We may conclude that although there is a relationship between the two indices, the magnitude of the relationship is less than would be expected between the dominant society and a subsociety of a complex, industrialized nation.

An item-by-item analysis of the relative rank positions held by occupations on the two indices revealed extreme differences for a number of occupations. [Table 2 about here.] In relation to the Duncan Index, the Choctaw Index demonstrates that Choctaws place higher valuation on selected technical, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled occupations than does the larger American society. Note, for example, that

(1) Para-professionals and sub-professionals in the health field are given higher statuses (e.g., nurses, both professional and practical, and medical or dental technicians and assistants).

(2) Skilled workers, such as automobile mechanics, electricians, carpenters, welders, etc., are given especial status.

(3) Unskilled workers, such as laborers and janitors, are given elevated statuses.

Generally, the occupations which were given elevated statuses are occupations which presently are held by, or else are narrowly accessible to, the more ambitious and better educated of the Choctaw population. Until recently, low-level positions with the BIA, such as janitor or laborer, were the "best available" jobs and generally went to the best-educated (Peterson, 1970b:264). As educational and occupational opportunities and alternatives have increased in recent years, highly-motivated Choctaws are moving into skilled jobs, and these are the jobs which may at present be characterized as the "best possible" for the average Choctaw household head. Another occupation, "member of armed forces," is valued in that service in the armed forces has long been a path accessible to and chosen by many Indians who sought to obtain occupational skills and to achieve some upward mobility when other alternatives were not open to them.

Examination of the occupations which are assigned high or moderate status on the Choctaw Index (see Table 1) appears to indicate

that functional importance and prestige correlates identified in other studies and suggested as criteria to the judges (i.e., education, skill or experience, responsibility, and rewards) are primary bases for the occupational evaluations made by the Choctaw judges. Many exceptions, however, indicate that relevance and "accessibility" of the occupations to Choctaws sometimes override other criteria.

For example, the top status positions in the Choctaw Index are assigned to school administrators, teachers, and professional nurses, with lawyers, physicians, and dentists receiving subsequent status positions. The reverse order holds in the Duncan Index. The positions of lawyer, physician and dentist, although functionally necessary to the Tribe, at the same time possess qualifications so stringent as to make them in effect inaccessible to Choctaws at the present time. On the other hand, a Choctaw now serves as an administrator of the Choctaw schools, a few Choctaw teachers are teaching in the elementary schools, and the educational requirements for becoming teachers and professional nurses are within the range of accessibility, although only to highly motivated and highly educated Choctaws. It appears that the more accessible of the professional positions are awarded the highest statuses. Nevertheless, other professional positions which are functionally important to the society (e.g., physician, dentist, etc.) are also given high status positions.

Relevance and accessibility to the Choctaw population also appear to play a large role in the derogation of selected professional and other white collar occupations in the Choctaw Index.(e.g., natural

scientist, editor or reporter, salesman, bank teller, insurance agent, etc. See Table 2.). The derogation of the remaining occupations listed conforms more to the education-responsibility-rewards criteria as well as to unique situational factors. For example, recreation and group workers, clergymen, out-reach workers, and school bus drivers are probably downgraded because they are either part-time positions and/or occupied by Choctaws with little education. The downgrading of "foremen" in all instances in which this title appears is an interesting phenomenon and is apparently a reaction against the placing of one worker in a superior position over other workers. The writers were advised that respect is given a Choctaw foreman or supervisor only if he works alongside the other men rather than simply giving orders and that this respect is enhanced if the foreman is more advanced in age than his subordinates.[4]

Conclusions

Although the factors identified as correlates of occupational prestige in previous studies (i.e., functional importance, education-skill-experience, scarcity, rewards, etc.) were also basic in the evaluations of the Choctaw judges, considerations of "relevance" and "accessibility" of the occupations to the Choctaw population often transcended these criteria and resulted in an occupational hierarchy somewhat variant from that of the larger society. In addition, certain structural and cultural factors unique to the Choctaw subsociety operated in the statuses assigned to occupations by them.

The findings of this study lend further support to the hypothesis of Haller, et al. (1972) that occupational prestige correlations

may diminish as isolation of a population increases. Although the product-moment correlation of .78 indicates a moderately high association between the occupational prestige evaluations of Choctaws and the larger society, an analysis of variance test demonstrated that significant differences exist between the two indices. In addition, the correlation coefficient of .78 is among the lowest reported in previous crosscultural studies and is lower than would be expected for a subsociety within the larger society of the world's most industrialized nation. Although the physical and cultural isolation of the Choctaws is based on ethnicity as well as federal policy and constitutes what is perhaps one of the more extreme cases in the United States, the findings of this study and those of Haller, et al. (1972) serve to point out the need for further study of the prestige assigned to occupations by isolated subsocieties as well as the need for a more comprehensive explanation of the variations that emerge.

Table 1. Comparison of Choctaw Occupational Prestige Index and Duncan Socioeconomic Status Index

Occupations	Choctaw Index Mean Ranks	Duncan Index Mean Scores
School administrator	90	78
Teacher	84	72
Nurse, professional	82	46
Lawyer	81	93
Physician or surgeon	79	92
Dentist	77	96
Technician: medical or dental	77	48
Computer programmer	76	62[a]
Tribal chairman	74	54[b]
Technician: electrical or electronic	74	62
Electrician	73	44
Draftsmen	72	67
Artist	69	67
Social or welfare worker	69	64
Sports instructor or coach	67	64
Airline pilot	66	79
Designer	64	73
Guidance counselor	63	74
Computer operator	62	47
Athlete	62	52
Actor	61	60
Policeman	61	40
Model	61	45[a]
Practical nurse	60	22
Secretary	60	61
Technician: other engineering or physical sciences	58	62[c]
Forester	58	48
Detective, private	58	36
Automobile mechanic	55	19
Tribal program coordinator	55	54[b]

Table 1. Continued

Occupations	Choctaw Index Mean Ranks	Duncan Index Mean Scores
TWEPT director	55	54[b]
Musician	54	52
Dental assistant	54	38
Instructional aide	53	44[a]
Proprietor: self-employed, construction	53	51
Welder	52	24
Beautician	51	17
Insurance agent	51	66
Sanitary engineering assistant	51	56[a]
Carpenter	50	19
Member of armed forces	50	18
Painter: construction or maintenance	50	16
Dietitian	49	39
Mail carrier	49	53
Social work aide	48	26[a]
Manager, official or proprietor (salaried): Ind. not rep.	48	62
Nurse's aides: IHS	47	22[a]
Machinist	47	33
Foreman: maintenance	46	49[a]
Editor or reporter	46	82
Natural scientist	45	80
Recreation or group worker	45	67
Salesman: wholesale	45	61
Operative: manufacturing, ship and boat building	44	16
Foremen: manufacturing, elect. mach.	43	60
Operative: manufacturing, motor vehicles	42	21
Foremen: manufacturing, nondurable goods	41	53
Craftswoman: tribal	40	32[a]
Sanitary aide: BIA	40	21[a]
Truck driver	40	15

Table 1. Continued

Occupations	Choctaw Index Mean Ranks	Duncan Index Mean Scores
Bank teller	38	52
Operative: nonmanufacturing, railroads	38	15
Maintenance worker: BIA	38	25[a]
Nurse's aide: tribal	37	22[a]
Clergymen	36	52
Salesclerk	36	39
Construction worker: BIA	34	19[d]
Janitor: BIA	34	9
School bus driver and janitor	34	24[e]
Operative: manufacturing, elect. mach.	34	26
Laborer: BIA	33	7[f]
Operative: manufacturing, apparel	33	21
Excavating, grading, and road mach. operator	32	24
Operative: manufacturing, paints	32	15
Outreach worker: tribal	32	26
School bus driver	31	24[e]
Operative: manufacturing, ind. not rep.	31	16
Operative: manufacturing, meat products	30	16
Construction worker: tribal	29	19[d]
Maintenance worker: tribal	29	25[g]
Operative: manufacturing, watches	29	28
Laborers: construction	25	7
Janitors: tribal	24	9
Laborers: nonmanufacturing, railroads	24	3
Cook (excluding private household)	23	15
Mainstream worker: tribal	22	8
Operative: manufacturing, sawmills	22	7
Laborers: nonmanufacturing, ind. not reported	21	6
Laborer: communications, utilities and sanitary service	19	6
Laborer: nonmanufacturing, wholesale and retail	19	12

Table 1. Continued

Occupations	Choctaw Index Mean Ranks	Duncan Index Mean Score
TWEPT worker: tribal	19	8[f]
Laborer: manufacturing, sawmills	15	3
Kitchen aide	12	10[a]
Babysitter	8	6[h]

[a]Assigned score; not included in Duncan Index.

[b]Listed in Duncan Index as Official or administrator: local public administration. As no distinction is made between levels of administrators, the score of "54" may represent too low an estimate for "tribal chairman" as it places him on the same level as his subordinates (e.g., tribal program coordinators and the TWEPT director). This lack of differentiation inherent in the Duncan scale probably accounts for the difference observed in assigned rank position between the two scales regarding the "tribal chairman" title.

[c]Score for "Technician (n.e.c.)."

[d]Score for "Carpenter."

[e]Listed as "Bus-driver" in Duncan Index.

[f]Score for "Laborer: Nonmanufacturing Industries."

[g]Listed as "Repairmen" in Duncan Index.

[h]Score for "Private household worker: Living out."

SOURCE: Duncan Socioeconomic Index for Occupations: "Table B-1," Appendix B, pp. 263-75 in Albert J. Reiss, Jr., et al., Occupations and Social Status, New York: Free Press, 1961.

Table 2. Occupations Differentially Evaluated within Choctaw Index in Comparison to Duncan Index[a]

Occupation	Difference in Rank Position	Occupation	Difference in Rank Position
Overevaluation[b]		Underevaluation[b]	
Automobile mechanic	+38.5	Natural scientist	-47.0
Practical nurse	+37.0	Editor or reporter	-45.5
Nurse, professional	+37.0	Recreation or group worker	-40.0
Beautician	+36.0	Clergyman	-34.5
Painter: construction or maintenance	+33.0	Foreman: manufacturing, electrical machinery	-31.5
Electrician	+31.5	Salesman	-30.5
Technician: medical or dental	+31.0	Bank teller	-29.0
Member of armed forces	+30.0	Operative: manufacturing, watches	-29.0
Carpenter	+27.5	Foreman: manufacturing, nondurable goods	-27.5
Welder	+22.5	Foreman: maintenance	-27.0
Policeman	+22.0	Insurance agent	-24.0
Detective, private	+21.0	Outreach worker	-21.0
Operative: manufacturing, ship building	+20.0	Salesclerk	-20.0
Computer operator	+19.5	School bus driver	-18.0
Model	+19.0	Operative: manufacturing, electrical machinery	-15.5
Tribal chairman	+17.5	Excavating, grading or road machinery operator	-15.5
Operative: nonmanufacturing, railroads	+16.5		
Laborer	+16.5		
Truck driver	+15.5		
Janitor	+15.0		
Dental assistant	+14.5		

[a]Occupations are analyzed here with reference to their rank-order positions within each index.

[b]In relation to the Duncan Index.

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FOOTNOTES

[2]Obtained for the larger study from which this paper was drawn.

[3]The large number of ties involved in the two indices precluded the use of Spearman's rho (r_s) in this study. Another ordinal statistic, Kendall's tau (τ), can handle large numbers of ties but is not comparable to r_s or r which have been used in previous studies (Siegel, 1956:219).

[4]Information acquired in conversation with Dr. John H. Peterson, an authority on Choctaw history and culture.

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